

JUNE-JULY, 1967

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No. 219

# Guide

A PUBLICATION OF THE PAULIST  
INSTITUTE FOR RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

Conscience

Penance

Dutch Catechism (2)

SAN ANSELMO CALIF 9496





## Live and Learn

Father Theodore Steeman, the Franciscan sociologist, recently pointed to one of the many lessons we can learn from the experience of renewal. "Because the pace of change is not uniform in the Church we must expect tensions," he remarks. Since some of the needed changes have to do with the exercise of authority, particular cases or efforts at change, may seem to be defiant. Actually, many of these episodes result from a foreseeable, inevitable tension. The norms and values taught by Vatican II have been more widely and rapidly accepted in some quarters than their application, by other elements in the Church, to required changes in our institutional structures.

One bishop has reduced the harmful consequences of this natural tension by listening eighty percent of the time, and devoting twenty percent of his time to the application of decisions based on this Christian consensus. Listening and action, along with prayer and confidence in God, could place these tensions at the service of the renewal undertaken by a great Council.

Daniel Callahan recently identified a more fundamental cause affecting the rate and quality of change in the Church. He applies the important distinction made by Robert Merton between manifest and latent functions of peoples' practices and social systems. There is a psychological and social function of religion which must be allowed for when change is undertaken. Groups of people persist in many manifest beliefs and activities mainly because they serve the latent function of preserving group identity. The conservative can do renewal a disservice by failing to acknowledge the defective latent influence of the manifest teachings and attitudes he mistakingly regards as unchangeable. The progressive can fail renewal by oversimplifying the psychological and social strains involved in the reform and renewal of the Catholic identity and goals.

Renewal in the Church will be retarded or furthered to the extent that Catholics, conservatives and progressives alike, really learn and grow from the very experience of reform.

JOHN T. MCGINN, C.S.P.

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### Guide, No. 219, June-July, 1967

Published 10 times a year (monthly except June-July, August-September when bi-monthly) by The Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle in the State of New York, 2852 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025. Second class postage paid at Ridge-wood, N.J., and additional mailing offices. Rates 1 year, \$1.00; 10c a copy; 5c in bulk to Seminarians.

# Christian Conscience

William H. Shannon

*The most secret core and sanctuary  
of a man, where he is alone with God*

In *The Difficulties of Anglicans*, John Henry Newman concludes his section on conscience with an oft-quoted passage: "If I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts (which indeed does not seem quite the thing) I shall drink—to the Pope, if you please,—but still to Conscience first and to the Pope afterwards."

I begin with this quotation from Newman because it emphasizes what has always been an essential element of Catholic moral teaching, though sometimes a forgotten one—namely, the unique role in our moral life of personal conscience. In our moral teaching today, it seems to me, we must face among other things, three especially urgent questions—questions which we must answer more adequately than we have in the past. The first two are theoretical questions: What precisely is conscience? What do we mean by the primacy of conscience in our moral life? The third question is an eminently practical one: How do we help people to develop a mature personal conscience?

Before attempting the first question and discussing what conscience is, I should like to speak briefly about two prevalent attitudes toward conscience—both of which I think are inadequate and even erroneous.

The first attitude I refer to is the tendency to exteriorize conscience and thus to depersonalize it. In this view conscience for all practical purposes is equated with the external law. The judgment as to whether

an act is good or bad is made simply by juxtaposing the action I have performed and the external law, with little personal decision being involved. Frequently this juxtaposing of my action and the external law takes place only post factum. In such a view of conscience sin becomes, not so much the personal decision of saying no to God, but rather something that happens to me. This way of conceiving conscience often comes to light in the confessional. A person enters the confessional and in effect says to the priest: "I have done such and such. Have I committed a sin?" On one side of the confessional screen is the penitent who presents his action for evaluation; on the other side is the priest who presumably has the knowledge of the law. Confession consists of bringing these two together, namely the action and the law, so that a judgment may be made. If the priest says: "No. That was not a sin," the penitent breathes a sigh of relief. He has been acquitted. There was no sin after all. If the priest's answer is: "Yes," then the penitent's reaction may well be: "I was afraid it was. Now that I know I have committed

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*This is the complete text of a talk given to the Sisters of St. Joseph at Rochester, New York.*

*Monsignor William H. Shannon, previously appeared in Guide, January, 1965, with his paper "The Council, the Liturgy and Christian Formation."*



sin, I am sorry. Please give me absolution."

This mentality which tends to turn conscience from being a personal judgment that a man makes on his own actions into a judgment that is made for him, is the unhappy and unhealthy situation produced all too often by the kind of moral indoctrination we have given in the past. We have tried in our moral teaching (whether in the classroom, the pulpit or the confessional) to be the consciences of others, to dictate their judgment of conscience. Being the conscience of another may seem to be an easier task than helping them to develop mature consciences of their own. But for such tactics we pay a frightful price. This exteriorizing of conscience does great harm to the Christian community. It keeps people perpetually adolescent in their moral response. It effectively stifles any moral initiative on their part.

### **MORAL GROWTH**

But there is a second attitude toward conscience which is almost the reverse of the first and which equally, though not so evidently, thwarts genuine moral growth. This I would call the over-interiorization of conscience. If the first attitude so exteriorizes conscience as to depersonalize moral judgment, the second attitude represents a tendency to interiorize conscience in such a way as to isolate it from anything exterior to the person that should enter into the decision of conscience. The decision of conscience is isolated from the concrete historical situation of the person who makes the decision. It is isolated too from the demands of the Gospel and from the corporate wisdom and experience of the Christian community.

Such a mentality makes the individual conscience the unique source of moral values rather than the personal discovery and experience of moral values. The individual approaches each moral decision armed only with the personal insights that are his own, ignoring the insights of others, even of the Christian community or even scorning those insights as a threat to personal decision-making.

If the first attitude is the result of a false moral indoctrination that distrusts personal decision, the second results from the

present moral confusion which equates freedom of conscience with a personal moral autonomy that refuses to look beyond the self for moral values. The first attitude leads to moral rigidity; the second leads to moral chaos. At first sight the second attitude toward conscience might appear to be the more mature; at closer examination it is seen in fact to be simply a different species of immaturity.

In the moral teaching that we engage in we must face the fact that increasingly with the young we are going to meet with the second attitude rather than the first. Our great temptation is apt to be that we shall be so concerned about the chaos generated by this mentality that we shall want to return to the former approach of dictating the decision of conscience as being at least the safer course of action. We must resist this temptation, with the realization that we cannot turn the clock back and with the conviction that the moral rigidity of the first attitude toward conscience is as reprehensible as the moral irresponsibility of the second. Our energies must be directed toward the formation of a right attitude toward conscience.

Our problem, then, is to develop an understanding of conscience that avoids both these extremes. Conscience is not simply a dictate which comes from without, neither is it an autonomous creator of moral values that operates solely within the individual.

### **A DESCRIPTION OF CONSCIENCE**

In attempting to clarify the meaning of conscience I do not intend to begin with a definition of conscience. I am not sure that conscience can be defined in such a way that the definition will tell us precisely what it is. Definitions, are, of course, useful tools. But we must be careful to use them only as tools. There is so much more to a reality than can be gotten into a definition. The reality of conscience is too complex a notion to be circumscribed by the terms of a simple definition. I prefer rather to begin with a description of conscience.

The reality of conscience is the experience of responsibility. We all under-



stand this. Conscience tells me that my action is mine and that I am accountable for it. But conscience not only tells me I am responsible for the separate moral actions I perform. It also tells me that I am responsible, within certain limits at least, for the moral being that I build up gradually through the actions I perform. Conscience, therefore, is the experience of responsibility not only for what I do but for what I am. The context in which this responsibility is experienced is the exercise of freedom. We are aware that we are accountable for our actions, only if they are truly our own; and they are truly our own only if they are free.

Conscience, therefore, may be described as the experience of responsibility in the exercise of freedom. If our understanding of conscience, then, is to be made precise, we must clarify the meaning of freedom and the meaning of responsibility. This is what I propose to do now.

### **FREEDOM AND CONSCIENCE**

By freedom I mean the power of self-determination which sets man apart from all other beings. Man does not "exist," like a plant or animal, harnessed to a natural order which totally determines his nature. A plant or an animal becomes what it is by internal necessity, by a determination fixed in nature. Man on the other hand becomes what he becomes by self-determination. He has, within limits of course, the capability of determining for himself what he will become. In other words, man "exists" in a situation of openness. He is open to various possibilities of self-realization. His most important task in life is to discover who he is and become who he is. And he becomes who he is not by some internal compulsion over which he has no control, but by choosing the self he will be. It is in this sense that we can say with the existentialists that man's existence precedes his essence. His freedom is a summons to become himself, to realize through his own choices the historical possibilities of his selfhood.

This is the positive aspect of human freedom—this freedom in view of something, this freedom *for* something—the freedom

to objectivize the capabilities of his being, to realize himself as a person, to become as fully a man as he can.

This freedom of self-realization, as I have described it, expresses an ideal or, if you will, an abstraction. For man's power of self-determination does not exist in a vacuum, but is historically situated. By that I mean that man strives to become himself in a concrete set of historical circumstances and in inter-relations with other persons. These historical circumstances may help or impede his personal growth. The persons he meets with may open or close themselves to him and thus limit or expand the scope of his freedom and its exercise.

### **THE HISTORICAL SITUATION**

There is then in man this constant tension between his drive for self-realization and the actual historical situation in which he finds himself and which influences the way in which this drive is actually realized. Take the example of a boy who is brought up in an environment where slashing automobile tires, breaking into stores and taking dope are normal forms of recreation. In the case of such a boy we may well question whether he is to be blamed for his transgressions. We may say that the guilt falls not on him but on those who see the situation which victimizes him and allow it to continue to exist. But whether he is held guilty or not, his capability of achieving authentic self-realization is seriously hampered by the historical situation in which, through no choice of his own, he finds himself.

In other words, a man comes into this world at a particular time, in a particular place and in a given community of men and women. He has the internal freedom to become himself, but the historical condition into which he is born may wonderfully expand or severely limit the objectivization of that freedom. If he is to become as fully a man as he can, it is not enough that he be free *for* self-realization; he must also be free *from* intolerable and inhuman conditions that prevent the achievement of authentic selfhood.

Having discussed what freedom is and



how its actual realization is affected by the situation in which it is exercised, I should like to move one point further and discuss the question: How does this freedom of man to achieve authentic self-hood express itself?

The answer may be stated very simply: it expresses itself in two ways: in man's actions and in his basic options or radical choices. It is in this light that we can distinguish freedom of action and freedom of option. This distinction is an important one; yet much of our moral training has ignored the second and consequently overemphasized the first (almost as if it were the unique expression of human freedom). Now there is no doubt that the most evidently recognizable expression of freedom is the freedom that we recognize in our actions. A man is free to act or not to act. He is free to act in one way or another. He is free to choose this object or that.

### *FUNDAMENTAL OPTION*

But what we need to realize more fully is that freedom involves not only what I do but what I am and what I want to become. It is not enough to see freedom embodied in isolated individual acts. Freedom at its deepest level is expressed in the radical choice that I make of the basic direction that I want my life to take. This is what I mean by freedom of option. Karl Rahner calls it "freedom of being." It is the positioning of my freedom toward a particular direction. It is the orientating of my freedom toward authentic self-realization or its opposite.

In other words, underlying a man's day-to-day decisions is an enduring choice that determines the basic thrust of his life. This basic option exercises a directive influence on the other choices he makes, on the actions he performs. Human actions, therefore, are, to a greater or lesser degree, an expression of man's basic option. Some actions are so momentous in their very substance that it is difficult to think of them as not embodying the fundamental orientation of a man's life; other actions, on the contrary, appear so unimportant or peripheral in their materiality that it is scarcely possible to think of them as embodying

this basic option. When a negative basic option clearly manifests itself in human actions, we speak of mortal sin. Venial sin, on the other hand, is an action which involves a bad choice, but one that is so superficial or unfree that it simply cannot be said to embody the basic option of life.

If I may put this in another way: the basic option of a Christian in grace is a choice explicitly for God. His basic moral stance is to say yes to God. When he does not act consistently with that basic choice, he commits venial sin. But that basic choice remains till he changes it by mortal sin. For this is precisely what mortal sin is: a reversal of that fundamental choice that governs his life. It is the adoption of a new moral stance: it is saying "no" to God.

This distinction between freedom of action and freedom of option is of far-reaching and practical importance in our own moral life and in our teaching of morality.

It helps us to understand that the Christian moral life must be viewed, not as a static unchanging response in isolated actions to certain moral demands, but rather as an ever-deepening growth in our lives of the influence of the radical choice to which Christian baptism commits us. More and more our life and its individual actions need to be brought under the influence of this radical choice.

### *SACRAMENT OF PENANCE*

Such an understanding of true moral growth would make our approach to the sacrament of penance more meaningful. It would help us to see that in this moment of encounter with the healing Christ we should be concerned, not simply with our failures in particular actions, but rather with the basic direction in which our lives are moving. Do our individual actions indicate a basic growth in unselfishness or in its opposite?

We need also to stress this distinction in helping young people to form sound and mature consciences. For example, when a young man and a young woman encounter difficulties in matters of chastity, we need to help them concentrate their attention not so much on the failures they may experi-



ence in individual actions, but on the basic direction in which their relationship is moving. Are they genuinely striving to make their love for one another more truly unselfish? Are they sincerely striving, even though not always succeeding, to think not simply of the enjoyment of the moment, but of what is truly and ultimately best for both of them? Or, on the other hand, have they reached a point where anything goes, where their relationship involves a great deal of self-seeking and mutual exploitation of one another? In other words, we have to help them see their individual actions, not in isolation, but as the embodiment of a basic direction in which their loving is moving.

### RESPONSIBLE EXERCISE OF FREEDOM

At this point it will be well to recall the description of conscience with which we began—that conscience is the experience of responsibility in the exercise of freedom. We have discussed the meaning of freedom. We have seen that it is the power of self-realization that operates within a given set of historical circumstances and expresses itself in man's actions and in his radical choices. It is time now to clarify what we mean by the experience of responsibility.

We readily recognize a correlation between freedom and responsibility. We disclaim responsibility for any of our actions that are not free. We admit our responsibility for what we do freely. We expect to be held accountable for our free actions.

Yet it should be noted that there is a certain ambiguity about the word "responsibility." It may be used in a passive sense, meaning that others hold me responsible for what I do; or it may be used in an active sense, meaning that I am truly acting responsibly in a given situation. For to say that I am held responsible for what I do does not necessarily mean that what I have done is a truly responsible action. At times, in fact, I may be held responsible for behavior that is irresponsible. The fact that I am responsible for my actions does not necessarily make me a responsible person. The fact that I am held accountable for my actions does not necessarily mean that I can

give a rational account of my actions. Being responsible for an action means more than being taken to task for having done it after I act; it also means taking sufficient thought about it before I act.

In other words, responsibility in the active sense of the word includes the notion of responsiveness. In any given situation, I must respond to the moral demands that I am able to discover in that situation. This means a number of things. It means that I must respond to the moral richness that is revealed to me in the very uniqueness of this situation. It means that I must respond to the Law of Christ and to the law of my nature, especially in the light of the insights offered to me by the tested wisdom and experience of the Christian community. It means that I must respond to the inspirations of the indwelling Spirit of God who reveals to me in the depth of my consciousness the demands of the law of love in the concrete situation that I confront.

### INSPIRATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

This responsiveness to the inspirations of the indwelling Spirit is a dimension of Christian conscience that we have too long neglected. We have perhaps been so concerned to make conscience a purely rational act—a judgment of practical reason, St. Thomas calls it—that we have forgotten the words of Jesus: "But when your Advocate has come, whom I will send you from the Father—the Spirit of truth that issues from the Father—he will bear witness to me." (John 15:26) "When he comes who is the Spirit of truth, he will guide you into all the truth." (John 16:13). It seems to me that the Council Fathers are speaking of this dimension of conscience when they tell us (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, art. 16): "Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor."

But, once I have brought to bear on the situation all the lights that I can discover I must make my own decision. No one else, whether priest, bishop or Pope, can make



it for me. This is what we mean when we speak of the primacy of conscience in our moral life. External laws and human authority are indispensable helps for me in arriving at the decision of conscience; but they can never be my conscience. They can never substitute for my conscience. The decision of conscience must be my own. It is a decision in which a man faces his God—alone. The decision he makes is as personal as the divine call which it answers. It is a decision into which a man puts his whole being, weighing his own authenticity in the balance.

### **DEVELOPING MATURE CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE**

The final question I want to discuss is: How do we help people, especially the young, to develop mature Christian consciences? This, of course, is the heart of the problem we face when teaching moral doctrine. There are no simple answers to the question. I shall be content to suggest a few guidelines.

1. We must communicate moral doctrine to our students; at the same time we must encourage them to think for themselves. The two must go hand in hand. Only if they are given a knowledge of moral truth can their thinking for themselves be truly responsible; only if they are thinking for themselves will the moral doctrine we communicate to them become convictions personally held by them.

For there is a great deal of difference between convictions personally held by me and unassimilated knowledge that I have received into my mind but never made my own.

Much of the moral knowledge—indeed the faith-knowledge also—of Catholics belongs to the second category rather than the first. Impersonal sets of propositions—inadequately understood and never reflected upon—have been stored up in their minds. They know these propositions. They can recite them accurately on request. But they have never really appropriated them by personal assent. They have never made them their own intellectually and psychologically.

We cannot be content merely to communicate moral information. We have to

confront our students with this information and help them to make it genuinely their own. We have to help them to be honest with themselves and dare to face at some time in their lives what can be a very upsetting question, namely the question: How much of what I have been taught do I really believe and how much do I simply preserve as closed formulas without ever really examining them. We have to be prudent, of course, in bringing about this confrontation. We are not asking them to examine what they believe with a view to rejecting it but rather with a view to assimilating it, appropriating it, making it their own. Until they do this, these truths are not really going to be vital influences in their lives (especially in their adult lives). They may go through the external motions of acting on them, either from routine or worse still from fear; but their heart will not be in it. And oftentimes a crisis in their lives, that they break under, will reveal how superficial their moral commitment really was.

We have to be on our guard against a subtle unconscious dishonesty on our own part. All too readily we tend to put a premium on submissiveness. We are happy with those who give external agreement to what we teach them. We may be inclined to be suspicious of those who show a tendency to think for themselves—especially when their thinking does not always come out the same way as ours. Yet we need to have faith in them—faith that, if we help them gradually to make their thinking truly responsible, they may end up much better off than the ones who refused to think and were quite content to “swallow” everything we told them.

### **CORPORATE ASPECT OF MORALS**

2. We must help them to see the corporate dimensions of Christian moral doctrine. Christian moral doctrine must not be looked upon simply as impersonal laws handed down by authority—laws that we must simply submit to. Rather, increasingly, we must come to view moral doctrine as the tested wisdom and experience of the whole Christian community. This is not to deny a place



of unique importance to the authority of the Church in teaching moral doctrine. It is simply to say that the teaching authority of the Church operates at its best when it listens to the Spirit speaking in the whole Church. The Council Fathers in the *Constitution on the Church* speak of the faithful as a whole bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel: "The body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief." (art. 12) After all, there is so little in the way of explicitly revealed moral doctrine in the Scriptures. Moreover, moral issues often-times can be so very complex. It makes sense, then, that Christian morality should be clarified through the very living of the Christian life. It makes sense that the whole Christian community, in whom the Spirit operates, should be involved, under the direction of the hierarchy, in clarifying the response that Christians should make to the demands of the Gospel. The task of the teaching Church, then, is not to stifle the Spirit, but rather, in the words of John's first epistle (1 John 4:1) to test the Spirit, to see that it is of God.

3. We must strive to communicate to our students a sense of joy in the living of the Christian life. They must not see their moral life "as the price they have to pay to save their souls," but rather as a joyful response to God our Father who loves

us and who creates in us the capability of loving Him in return.

Our moral life, in other words, must be seen as built around grace, not around sin. We must replace a sin-mentality with a grace-mentality. We must make it clear that a Christian is one whose ordinary life is the life of grace, not a constant moving to and fro, from grace to sin, from sin to grace.

This means that our students must be made to understand more fully the radical choice for God which is the essence of the Christian life and the fact that mortal sin involves a reversal of that radical choice. We must never let them confuse mortal sin with something that is completely different from it, namely venial sin. Mortal sin and venial sin are not two species of the genus "sin." The difference between them is not just a matter of degree. They differ in kind one from another. For venial sin means acting inconsistently with the radical option of our lives—something we all do at times; mortal sin is a deliberate reversal of that option.

In conclusion I would simply say that we must respect the inviolable dignity of personal conscience. With Newman we may well drink a toast to conscience, that "most secret core and sanctuary of a man," where he is alone with God.

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## The Sacrament of Penance

As we become aware of our vocation as Christians, there follows the conviction that we continually need the forgiveness of God and men. We all have faults. But we can rejoice in these words of Christ to Peter, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven" (Mt 18:22), that is, always. We should repeat with the prodigal

son: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and you. I no longer deserve to be called your son" (Lk 15:21).

Whoever is aware of his own need for forgiveness learns to forgive. It is only possible to forgive when one really knows himself.

We all recognize that we have sorrowed



others, notwithstanding the best intentions. Likewise we know how desperately men seek human happiness. Therefore should we not trust the good intentions of all others? Should we not show each other the spirit of forgiveness, so as to exemplify the goodness and mercy of God?

Surely it would be an impoverishment of the Christian spirit in family and social life if we did not value mutual forgiveness as Christ himself did when he said: "So when you are presenting your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother has any grievance against you, leave your gift right there before the altar and go and make up with your brother; then come back and present your gift" (Mt 5:2-324). We must try, insofar as possible, to foster reconciliation with others and to make reparation for offenses. Confession cannot dispense us from this obligation; rather it should foster this effort. When we have failed, we must confess this failure and ask for forgiveness.

### PUBLIC CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT

The church and holy scripture have always taught that sins are forgiven in many ways; the liturgical and extraliturgical forms, far from being opposed, are complementary. Among such forms are the authentic celebration of the eucharist, the silent prayer of self-examination, fasting, almsgiving, the admission of fault and request for forgiveness from our neighbor. All these are summarized and confirmed, as it were, in the absolution of the priest in the sacrament of penance.

In recent times, besides the well known private confession, the *public celebration of penance* is becoming more and more accepted. By this we understand a celebration where Christians publicly confess before God and men that they are sinners; the priest invites them to this through a meditation on life and a request for the mercy of God on all of good will. In this celebra-

tion there is no *specific confession* of sins, nor is there the absolution which is given in private confession.

These types of celebration can be enriched in many ways. It can be helpful to come together, to seek integrity and fraternity, to mutually hear the admission of faults. This celebration can become the clear sign that men are reconciled, a sign that energizes the renewal of our lives. All will understand how this celebration can be for many a great help in the formation of their conscience and the development of a mature sense of responsibility. Also, it offers the priest an opportunity to teach Christians "to see in their hearts, beyond their deeds and attitudes," and so to appreciate the precise value of the connection between intimate feelings and external conduct.

Jesus says in the gospel: "For wherever two or three are gathered as my followers, I am there among them" (Mt 18:20). The Lord is present and, so we believe that all who are sincere obtain forgiveness in a general prayer of intercession. As a matter of fact, we believe that whenever man, influenced by God's grace, is sorry for his sins, forgiveness is always obtained even before the absolution reserved to private confession is pronounced over him. But in the same way we believe that whenever there is no repentance, there is no forgiveness.

### THE PLACE OF PRIVATE CONFESSION

But if public celebrations of penance are on the increase, it does not follow that private confession should become obsolete. Rather it is desired that this celebration should be a school wherein we learn to make our confession before a priest, the representative of both God and the community of men, a deeper, more personal event. Particularly during Lent, the time of preparation for Easter, we should ask whether the sacrament of penance is a real event in our lives. Going to confession is an encounter in which we meet God as a Father who understands and desires a greater intimacy with us. It is a journey back to the father's house, or in other

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*This is the text of a pastoral letter issued by the Bishops of Holland, March, 1965.*



words, a journey to again find understanding, concern, and interest. Christ speaks of the sheep that is lost, tired, and alone. He goes in search and carries the lost sheep back to light and warmth.

Confession has to take place in prayer; only in prayer can it be a true encounter with the Lord. It is needless to say, then, that haste on the part of either the penitent or the confessor must be avoided. Both must try to create an atmosphere that favors a real human contact, in such a way that repentances and forgiveness are experientially realized. Perhaps confessions have left us unsatisfied because in our hearts there remained the feeling that our confession was not authentic, that it did not really express our state of sin or weakness. Perhaps we have said many things without really confessing them.

A regular and well prepared confession will be helpful for everyone who wishes to grow in the Christian life, who seeks a spiritual guide, and who wants to hear the proclamation of mercy and forgiveness in the deepest part of his being.

### *OBLIGATION TO CONFESS GRAVE SINS IN THE SACRAMENT*

Let us remember that there is always the obligation to explicitly mention every mortal sin in confession. All should ask whether they are evading real obligations. Likewise we should ask whether we are actually willing to submit our personal judgment to the control and judgment of others, of the Church. We must ask ourselves whether we are not avoiding a sincere confession of our faults. A grave fault demands a greater reparation than an inadvertent act which does not provoke grave consequences. Do we consider ourselves seriously guilty? Let us have the courage to admit it. Let us recognize that we have damaged the Church and have hindered her growth. In this case a personal confession through the sacrament of penance is in

order. Anyone in this situation who confesses before a priest who knows how to listen to him and who has the power to forgive in the name of God will experience how beneficial, liberating, and consoling private confession can be.

The public celebration of penance should not be developed at the expense of private confession. The public celebration in itself and through the words of the priest should be like an invitation towards a more personal, more authentic private confession.

### *HINTS TO THE CLERGY*

Every priest hearing private confessions must make a special effort to act in such a way that the sacrament is received in an atmosphere of peace and prayer, so that the Christian can express himself authentically and a true pastoral contact between the priest and penitent may be brought about. In both public proclamation and personal direction, the priest, looking first to the dispositions of the human heart, will carefully and respectfully help the faithful in a way that facilitates sincere conversion.

It is also advisable that the priest with care of souls make use of the celebration of public penance to awaken in the faithful an ever increasing awareness of the social and ecclesial dimensions of human guilt. In this way they may help to form their conscience with greater depth and make them understand more fully how every one of us, personally and collectively, is responsible for every existing sin in the human community.

The Church has always taught that man, even before private confession, can be forgiven by the sincerity of his repentance. Likewise the Church believes that only the man who truly repents can receive the forgiveness of his sins in the sacrament of penance.



# New Dutch

## Catechism for Adults <sup>(2)</sup>

*The conclusion to a two-part summary of  
this latest event in modern catechetics*

Throughout the exposition of the "Life of our Lord," the direct appeal of each episode is underlined by a constant reference to the response of faith demanded from the reader: "In every episode Jesus is there in his entirety, calling to us. A story from the gospels is not something that one can sit back and listen to at leisure, with one's legs crossed, as it were. It is a summons to stand up and go." In keeping with this approach, there is a description of the nature of faith which leaves the abstract formality of the "intellectual assent" far behind. Faith is "the knowledge of the good tidings gained by the surrender of the whole person, by the attitude of going out of oneself." It is not surprising, therefore, to find the liturgy evoked (and briefly described) in relation to relevant passages of the gospel—Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Pentecost. This is because "liturgical commemoration is not just the work of memory . . . The liturgical celebration re-enacts the event not just in thought, but in reality. Everything celebrated was some encounter of God with man. But God is ready to bring about once more the grace of this event in those who celebrate it together. They re-live the same encounter as those did who once met it with open hearts"—and better than those who were only there in the body.

The sacraments are the most strict and proper continuation of Christ's "signs," beginning with the manifestations of the Risen

Lord. They are the "outward sings of Christ's will to meet us" in the Church, which is the "primary sacrament," where, "at the high points of man's life," "Christ's hands reach out to us and his word is spoken to us." The total effect of the apparent digressions into theology and liturgy is to make the history of the Son of Man the vital ever-present force in each Christian life.

### PART IV CHRIST'S WAY

The way "from Christ to the end," after a rather detailed history of the primitive Church, the origin of the New Testament, the Bible as the permanent basis and Mary as the "type" of the Church, gives a "history of the Church," in some thirty pages, which shows the path of the people of God as part of the history of salvation. Three main lines are followed: "striking events, religious communities, constant humanizing," though with no attempt to conceal the negative elements. The "triumphalism" is drawn very mild indeed; the call to repentance for Catholics' faults in the great schisms and apostasies is insistent and

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*From Herder Correspondence. A monthly Review of the Christian's World. Published by Herder and Herder, Inc. 232 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016*



sincere. The very way in which the beginning of the Reformation is described is instructive: "A man with words of prophetic power and deeply religious conviction started in Germany, about 1517, a movement which could not remain within the universal Church: MARTIN LUTHER." Without giving a onesided picture of the events, the catechism notes that "the Reformed Christians were persecuted by the Inquisition"—"a dark page in the history of the Church." Of the medieval Inquisition the catechism writes: "We in our day have to ask ourselves how was it possible that Christian society could proceed against the heterodox in the same way as the Roman Empire had acted against Christians? It shows once more how the unity of interest of Church and State, which was then very marked, can harm the gentleness and simplicity of the gospel . . . and how truly the Church is a humanity which has to grow in God." This is of course the right approach to "apologetics," since no one can truly defend the faith who is afraid to look the facts in the face.

### DETAILS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

After the history of the Church, the great features of the Christian life are treated: some, like faith, hope, charity and the sacraments, in greater detail than in the earlier parts; others, like marriage, the evangelical counsels, Church and State, for the first time. The general trend, the new approaches, the special spirit and emphasis should appear sufficiently from the following instances.

The "people of God" are those who encounter Christ in the Catholic Church. "But we should not refuse the name of Christ's Church to those who live in schisms or heresies. Only along with them can we be called the Church in the fullest sense." But what of "the others?" "Can those whose lives are dedicated to service have redemptive contact with Jesus without baptism?" The answer is ecumenical in the widest sense. "The unbaptized come into contact with Jesus in any case by the very fact of being born. For they have Jesus as

their fellowman. The Church is convinced that if they are men of good will, they share in Jesus' redemption." Faithfulness to their task in life causes them to be "baptized with the baptism wherein Jesus was baptized"—his death. "Everyone who is 'obedient unto death' is touched by Christian baptism."

But, in that case, what about unbaptized babies who have never come to the use of consciousness? Having recounted the various hesitations of the past, the catechism concludes: "First of all, it is certain that God wills all men to be saved. This certainly includes children, who according to the gospel seem to be specially loved by God. Secondly, Christ died for all men. Finally, no one is lost except through sins which he has personally committed. Therefore there must be a way of salvation for unbaptized babies. What it is precisely we do not know. But we do know that they are in Christ." Thus an even wider basis than baptism is indicated for ecumenism: "the fact of being a human being."

### THE TEACHING ON SIN

To give the true notion of the history of salvation with which the catechism has dealt, it returns to the notion of sin. Here we find one of the most marked "developments of dogma" in the book. The "sin of the world" is sometimes explained away as imperfect development, not sin but immaturity. Sometimes, again, merely psychic defects are made the cause of all misdeeds. But at the critical moment these explanations seem too glib and hygienic to meet the fatal, yet inexcusable, collective inability to love. This "original sin" is treated in Genesis 1-11 and Romans 5. "The core of human history is given in symbol-laden stories . . . Adam is man, Cain is found in the newspapers and in our own hearts, the corruption of the age of Noah and the building of Babel—this is what we are." God creates, calls man to his friendship, and man sins. "Four times a fall is described: the eating of the forbidden fruit, the murder, the wickedness of the times of Noah, the building of Babel." There is a



restoration each time. The message is clearer in the New Testament.

"At first sight it seems that St. PAUL affirms that sin came into the world through *one* man. But the reiteration of the word 'one,' in which St. PAUL was tributary to the world-view of his times, is part of the literary dress, not the message." What the passage *teaches* is that much as sin and death reigned, even more fully came grace and eternal life through Jesus. We have concentrated too much on the fall in paradise, which is a priceless picture of man before God, but can and must be replaced as a description of the beginning of mankind.

### THE ORIGIN OF SIN

What then are we to think of the beginning of sin? Our earlier view of the world was static. We looked to the beginnings for explanations, because things were supposed to stay the way they began. But the dynamic view, which we now have, does not say, for instance, that "God created." It prefers to affirm that "God creates." The beginning is less important than it once seemed. So, too, with sin. There is no need to attach any special importance to a "first sin." The main thing is not that man sinned and was corrupted, but that he sins and is corrupted. How sin begins in each of us we do not know. "Evil cannot be comprehended. It is nonsense, the absurd in the worst sense of the word. We ask ourselves in vain after each sin—how could I have done that?"

But sin exists, and in a contagious solidarity throughout the world which defies full explanation. "Even in earlier times, it was not claimed that it was fully understood. An explanation was sought in 'human nature' as propagated by human generation from sinful Adam. But this explanation of collective sin is not part of what is *per se* revealed. The real unity of the human race is not that of descent ('Greek, barbarian or Jew'), but, according to scripture, that of the one call from the one Father. The collectivity of guilt lies on the

same level, in the refusal of the call. It does not come to us merely by descent, but from all sides, along all the ways in which men are in contact with each other. The sin which stains all was not committed by an Adam at the origin of mankind, but by Adam, each man." In former times, the coming of "original sin" through our ancestry was stressed, with much attention to original sin in children. "But now that we see better the totality of the stain, stemming from all mankind, the stress is coming to be laid on adult man."

This is clearly a re-reading of scripture and of Trent (DENZINGER 787-92; cf. "The sin of Adam, one in origin, transmitted by propagation, not by imitation"). Some such re-thinking had been already recognized to be not merely defensible but indispensable. To many it will come as a relief and an enlightenment. It would be rash to reject it without a reading of the whole of the sources, at least as careful as that which lies behind the new formulation.

### MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Now a few practical attitudes which also reveal the new spirit articulate in this book. In the copious and solid section on marriage two "insoluble" cases of conscience are discussed. One is that of a hasty marriage entered on by partners who are "mentally immature and practically forced into it by the weight of social opinion," as when there is a child to legitimate. The Church cannot declare such a marriage null, since proof of compulsion cannot be provided. A conflict arises between a just law, the public order which the Church as witness to Christ cannot but uphold, and the personal conscience. "In such cases, a thorough discussion with a prudent spiritual director can free a person from much unnecessary fear. It can even happen that a believer comes to the conclusion that his marriage does not bind him in conscience."

But there is the even more difficult case of an absolutely free marriage which becomes an unbearable situation, even for the children. Some men, "who are in gen-



eral conscientious," marry again outside the Church. "Are they to be excluded *per se* and perpetually from the sacraments? He alone knows who knows all things. In particular cases, a wise priest can help such men to a conscientious judgment . . . since the sacraments are given us on our faltering way to strengthen and nourish us. The priest can help to form the judgment of conscience, but he cannot take it over. Here as elsewhere the ultimate certainty of conscience lies with the individual himself." This must of course be read in its context of the emphatic affirmation of the indissolubility of marriage.

### THE QUESTION OF FAMILY PLANNING

In the delicate matter of family planning, which is still in suspense, the catechism is firm and clear. The need for the regulation of births is not based on the "population explosion" but on the new possibility and necessity of men's fruitful love being consciously and freely exercised. "Children are to be called into the world in conscious love." The number depends on how well a given family can most fully realize its love for its own and for society.

"There are many methods of birth regulation, as everyone knows today. They all aim at making the intercourse of love possible between man and wife without conception ensuing. The last Council, in the relevant chapter of the constitution on 'the Church in the World,' did not pronounce on any of these concrete methods. This attitude differs from that adopted about thirty years ago under POPE PIUS XI, and maintained by his successor. We can see here a definite development in the Church, and one which is also taking place outside the fellowship of the Church."

Are all methods of contraception equally permissible to the Christian conscience? Here the catechism takes the silence of the Council to signify assent. "The Council did not answer this question. It does call on married people to interrogate their conscience as to whether the practices in question do full justice to the high values which should be given expression in mar-

riage and marital intercourse. The sensible thing in such cases is to turn also to a doctor who can take all the different circumstances into account and judge prudently in each particular case what is medically the best. Neither the doctor nor the priest can say the last word in this matter of conscience; but reverence for life demands that no practices should be chosen which could seriously harm health or the emotional life." It would seem, therefore, that no methods of birth control which are acceptable to the good sense and conscience of the Christian are forbidden in the catechism.

### THE QUESTION OF MIXED MARRIAGE

The catechism looks forward to the time when the Church, in certain exceptional cases, will dispense the marriage of Catholics and non-Catholics from the canonical form, so that civil marriage will be recognized as ecclesiastically valid. No similar hope is expressed for mixed marriages before a Protestant minister or the like. But last year's Roman instruction, foreseeing such dispensation when the non-Catholic refuses conscientiously to place no obstacle in the way of the Catholic education of the children, or even to get married in a Catholic form, is taken into account—but only as "an obviously and extremely exceptional case." There is no express wish or suggestion that all mixed marriages before non-Catholic pastors should be automatically recognized. This is not from lack of the ecumenical spirit, which is so dominant throughout the book. It is due rather to the dead set against mixed marriages which is so thoroughly explained in this section. The catechism sees no really happy future for them. They are either the result of, or a flight into, religious indifference. Where earnest Christians are involved, there can be no compromise. "But where everything founders, even canon law in a certain sense, is: the child. The marriage comes to its climax in one living person, and here there is no more room for compromise."

There is a salutary warning against su-

perfidious ecumenical motives. "Those who think of a mixed marriage should not put forward the specious motive that this would further the cause of union between the churches. On the contrary, it would be to implant a tragic situation of Christianity into the very heart of a marriage, indeed, into the one human person of the child."

This sample survey must also mention

the profound and extensive treatment of the "evangelical counsels" of poverty, chastity and obedience, very welcome at a time when the religious life is called in question on so many grounds.

A remarkable book, it is to be translated into six languages in the near future. That is far from being its only pentecostal aspect. ■ ■ ■

## FAITH AND DOUBT

*More serious are those doubts that seem to call into question the stance of faith itself. Many believers in our day are attacked by the suspicion that faith, as such, may be unwarranted. They are tempted to reject Christianity altogether and base their lives on what seems obvious and clear from experience. If a person has such feelings, he should not be distressed, as though his faith ought not to be threatened. By its nature, faith is suspended over the abyss of unbelief, and hence is liable to be questioned at any time. Caught in the grip of involuntary doubt, the believer must continually turn to God with fresh humility. "I do believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:23).*

*When taken too much for granted, faith degenerates into superstition or fanaticism. When seared by doubt, it comes into its own as faith; it proves itself as steadfast adherence to the unseen God. The man of faith, like Abraham, ventures boldly into the unknown and hopes against hope (Heb. 11:8; Rom. 4:8). Relying on God's word alone, faith grounds man's existence in its true source and gives solidity to his whole life. "Unless your faith is firm," said Isaiah to King Ahaz, "you shall not be firm" (Is. 7:9).*

Avery Dulles  
America, March 11, 1967



# Books Received

The Names and Titles  
of Jesus

Leopold Sabourin, S.J.  
McMillan. \$7.95

This book will find a prominent position among the scholarly works of recent theologians and scriptural scholars, but it will equally be of immense help to all those who would "see" Jesus. The author takes as his point of departure, the names and titles of Jesus and develops the themes of biblical theology which they connote. He combines immense learning with admirable clarity as he analyzes some fifty of the names and titles of the Word made flesh. Explaining his approach, Father Sabourin reminds us, "anyone who appreciates the full significance the name held for the biblical mentality will understand that value. For a Semite, the name represents and embodies the man that it designates."

By contemplating the inexhaustible reality of Jesus experienced by the Apostles, the apostolic Church employed a rich variety of names and titles to convey his significance. Some of these have come down to us and are familiar to every Catholic from the Sunday Gospels. Others have not endured. But all of them throw light on the central mystery of Christianity and each of them brings us a step nearer to Him who is the only way to the Father.

The Dimensions of the Church  
Avery Dulles  
Newman. \$1.50

This is Volume No. 8 of the "Woodstock Papers" of "Occasional Essays in Theology," and its sub-title explains that it is "A Post-conciliar Reflection." In the five chapters which manifest the heart of the author's thinking, he discusses aspects of the nature and mission of the Church with emphasis on her function to unite all men in Christ. Chapter One, "The Dimensions of the Church," dwells on characteristics of Christ's Church and clarifications taught

by the Council. Under the figure of the height, width and length of the Church he succeeds in conveying a deeper awareness of the Church as open, concerned and loving all men in Christ.

A Church concerned with all men, certainly cannot be aloof from other Christian traditions, and Chapter Two dwells on the question of Catholic principles of ecumenism. And since the vast majority of mankind is non-Christian a concerned Church must have an informed love and zeal for men of non-Christian traditions. Hence, Chapter Three discusses missiological questions seen in the light of our changing world and of the renewed Church.

Every Christian lives simultaneously in the Church and in the world. This raises theoretical questions and numerous practical problems regarding the proper relation between the religious and the secular. In Chapter Four, "The Church and the World," the author addresses himself to some of the more basic phases of Christian secularity. Father Dulles wisely included a chapter on "The Church in Bonhoeffer's 'Worldly Christianity.'" Few men have protested more against Christian disunity or endeavored more to reinterpret the Good News for the "religionless" men of our time. Bonhoeffer did have limitations, but he also had immense positive value, and the Christian should know him well.

Christian Morality Today  
Charles E. Curran  
Fides. \$1.50

If you missed this slim book on aspects of "The Renewal of Moral Theology" here is a reminder that it is distinctly worthwhile. The author is the young theologian whose case focused national attention on the Catholic University of America and on its basic purpose, procedures and structures. More than anything else, this episode highlighted the problem of assimilating the teachings and spirit of Vatican Council II



and the difficulties in implementing its vision and directives.

The main chapters of this volume appeared earlier in various periodicals, one of them in *Guide*. They reveal the author as moderate, knowledgeable and completely dedicated to a renewed vision of Catholic morality. They also manifest how the Catholic community is undertaking the task of transcending the deficiencies of the past and learning to adjust to old neglected insights and a new understanding both of the Church and the world. It is, therefore, an interim but a highly useful statement on some of the main questions that challenge Christians as they try to follow Christ in our day.

The writer sees Moral Theology's primary function "to bring mankind and the whole world into an ever greater participation in the life and love of God." His respect for St. Thomas and Tradition go hand in hand with a wide awareness of contemporary thinking and an eagerness to serve perplexed men. He devotes two chapters to an excellent treatment of conscience and freedom, two to the provisional state of many moral teachings, and one to the question of Sunday observance. Four chapters reflect Father Curran's own development in his reflection on marriage.

Elections in the Church  
Joseph O'Donoghue  
*Helicon*. \$5.95

The content of this book is broader than its title suggests. The writer does have good things to say about the need for democratic processes in the Church, but about many other essential ingredients of renewal as well. His central theme is the implementation of Vatican II, especially on the American scene. He believes that "the future of renewal of the Church depends on each individual Christian's theological awareness of his own charismatic endowment."

Keeping in mind this need for a basic theological and personal re-orientation, he discusses aspects of structural reform to supplement and facilitate this outlook. Areas of particular concern are dealt with in chapters on renewal in parishes, schools, and the celebration of the sacraments. Other

sections have thoughtful and useful suggestions on national hierarchies, the international Church and on the need to develop leaders. This reviewer liked especially his concluding chapter, "The Future: Challenge or Caution," in which he advocates courage to be insecure, to listen, to accept tension and to dream.

Regarding episcopal elections, he sees this as flowing from the Council teaching on collegiality and the priesthood of the faithful. Along with other writers, he is highly conscious of the beneficial effects of the "American Experience both in religion and politics and the influence this exerted on the thinking of Vatican II." Hence his plea for a Catholic laity that is informed, trusted, with responsibility in decision making and better communication with the hierarchy—all leading to elections as a means of reform within the Church. "Do we really trust the People of God," he asks, "their faith and their power of judgment?"

J.T.M.

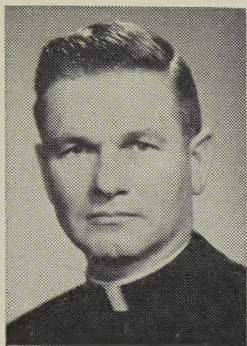
## GUIDE

- A publication of the Paulist Institute for Religious Research.
- Officers: Joseph V. Gallagher, C.S.P., *Director*. George C. Hagmaier, C.S.P., *Associate Director*. Editor of *Guide*, John T. McGinn, C.S.P.
- Concerned with ecumenism, Christian witness and adult catechetics.
- Published 10 times a year (monthly except for combined issues of June-July and in August-September).
- Annual subscription \$1.00. Single issue 10¢. Bulk lots to seminarians at 5¢ a copy.

## GUIDE

2852 Broadway  
New York, New York 10025





# Guide Lights

## LITURGICAL PROBLEMS . . .

At a recent seminar of priests from Information Centers a session was devoted to liturgy and catechumenate. In many ways this proved disappointing. Apart from the obviously indicated practices of conferring the sacrament of baptism in stages, administering the Eucharist under both species at first Communion, and use of the Mass as the setting to confer baptism, there were few significant reports. The most encouraging thing was that liturgy, however inadequate, was being seriously incorporated into the initiation processes of the catechumenate. Upon reflection, maybe the lack of more significant liturgical development in these conditions is not so bad after all. We can hardly expect that the introduction of a neophyte into the Christian community should be expressed more meaningfully than the full worship life of the community itself. The liturgy of the catechumenate can't be expected to outstrip the liturgy of the rest of the Church. The situation with the latter is that while a real breakthrough has been made and the process of overhauling liturgical activity is under way, the real sense of liturgy itself has not yet moved into the people enough.

## THE TWO FACES OF LITURGY . . .

Some attractive liturgical items did turn up during this seminar. However, they were little para-liturgical things, such as joining the ceremony of exorcism with the catechumen's first confession, the use of a white mantilla as baptismal robe, and an imposition of hands by lay sponsors in the enrollment ceremony. None of these is particularly significant, and yet each of them has a certain appeal. This may be because they bring into religious ceremony things

that are a familiar part of everyday life. However, this is only one face of liturgy. There is also another. Not only does liturgy employ symbols and actions that have meaning to the people who use them, but more important, it expresses divine realities. Real liturgical progress cannot be had unless it extends in both of these directions. It is probably just as well that there has not been too much advance in the use of modern symbols in the baptismal liturgy. This doesn't mean that the liturgy couldn't use them, for it certainly could. But at least an imbalance has been prevented until the other face of liturgy can be mirrored in them as well.

## BORROWING FROM SECULAR LITURGIES . . .

There is a whole warehouse of sign and symbol to choose from if we are simply trying to relate our symbolism more closely to human experience. Such pedestrian functions as high school graduations, Fourth of July parades, and now the picketing process, offer themselves as familiar expressions of some fairly basic human realities. And as a superb example of what symbol can say, we have just to recall those hours of television that showed the funeral of President Kennedy. This is the kind of thing that is readily available as we search around for more humanly meaningful actions for our religious life. However, once again, let it be stressed that it is not simply a question of finding suitable symbols. This could end up in as sterile a liturgical orthodoxy as the one from which we are barely emerging. What is decisive is our grasp of the divine reality that these symbols are selected to convey.

## EXPRESSING CHRIST'S PRESENCE . . .

The central divine reality that the liturgy of the Church expresses is the paschal mystery. In order to relate this to the actual life situation of catechumens, a



a re-appreciation of the elements of the mystery is necessary. This does not simply involve study and an intellectual grasp of the structure of the mystery. It goes deeper and challenges a person's vision of Christ. This means Christ as he is and acts here and now. Father Godfrey Diekmann believes that the most important emphasis in the Constitution on the Liturgy is on the various presences of Christ. He thinks this is a key to our appreciation of liturgy. On that basis, in a catechumenate situation, the priest must take very seriously into account the presence of Christ "where two or three are gathered together in my name." This is the situation he faces. These catechumens are not yet ready for the eucharistic presence of Christ. Nor are they experiencing the presence of Christ in his Church in its full reality. Presumably, they are exposed to the presence of Christ in Scripture and in the people of God. However, the presence that is peculiarly their own is the kind that Jesus described above. In bringing the Paschal Mystery to bear on the lives of catechumens, this "real" presence should be revealed anew to them in suitable signs and actions. This is an especially apt aspect of the divine reality that liturgy should try to express, and it is a good point of departure for catechumenate liturgy.

#### LIVING THE FAITH . . .

If the sense of this presence of Christ is very vivid in the catechumenate then it will naturally seek to find some kind of communal expression amongst those who experience it. Acknowledgment of this presence is natural. And, since the presence itself is not formally structured, then the response probably would include spontaneous and informal prayer. Also, the presence of Christ amongst newly called disciples would suggest a dialogue of questioning and seeking. Thus, discussion in this atmosphere can be truly liturgical. Without making any particular brief for these forms, the point is that catechumenate liturgy should make some effort to match the way in which the catechumens are presently experiencing their faith. This is somewhat different than the way in which they will experience it later on and so deserves a different kind of expression.

#### GOD IS CALLING . . .

The foregoing only speaks of the presence of Christ. However, he is also acting

and his actions, while always the same in effect, are not always the same in what they reveal. While the people of God share a common history of salvation, each of them also experiences a personal history of his own. In the catechumenate, there is a group of people who, while being called each personally by God, nevertheless share a common experience we call "vocation." This is another aspect of divine reality that should be taken into account when searching for suitable symbols. In the life of each catechumen there are certain kinds of things—crises, sufferings, love, etc., through which God has revealed himself. These are the kind of things that should be expressed symbolically in catechumenate liturgy as best descriptive of what is going on in the lives of the catechumens. Exactly how this is done poses another problem. It is conceivable, however, that in a highly developed liturgy of the future something akin to the medieval dramas might be seen. To a television conscious public, the acting out of the dramatic dialogue between God and man that takes place in the lives of those who come to believe would express in a very vivid way a profound experience. I am not suggesting that this is where we should begin, but conceivably it is where we might end.

#### PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS . . .

The lesson here and now is *experimentation*. It is badly needed. It must be done, even though in many cases it will be done badly. We have come to the point where the theology and history of liturgy have made their major contribution. Now it is time for life experience to make its own. The American bishops sought approval from the post-conciliar commission for such experimentation but the approbation has not been finally given. If enough people express their concern and demonstrate the need for this some action may follow. So, very practically, all possible experimentation within present norms should be pursued. Whenever new kinds of experimentation seem necessary, persistent appeal to the Bishops' Liturgical Commission and to the local ordinary will remind them that these things need attention. If enough people do this over a period of time some more development may come. It is a slow process but we are way behind in our homework.

JOSEPH V. GALLAGHER, C.S.P.